

Washington, DC – U.S. Representative John Hall (D-NY19) released the following statement after today's House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing on the Department of Veterans Affairs bonuses.

"We have to hold the VA responsible for the way it serves veterans, and today's hearing is a good first step. I don't believe top VA officials should be getting huge bonuses, up to \$30,000, when over 600,000 claims are pending from veterans, many of them for months and even years," said Congressman Hall. "We heard the VA say today that 87 percent of its staff received performance ratings of 'excellent' or 'outstanding' while veterans are kept waiting. What we found out is that the VA is not linking its bonuses or performance appraisals to the overall performance of the Department. It's way past time for that to change."

Hall noted that the VA's top official, Secretary Jim Nicholson, was asked to testify by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee but failed to show up.

"It is disappointing that Secretary Nicholson did not feel that reporting to Congress on his Department's bonus awards at today's hearing was a priority," said Hall. "The deputy he sent in his place, Gordon Mansfield, admitted to not having proper and adequate information on the subject of the bonuses. This is yet another deeply troubling sign of a lack of accountability coming from this Administration and the VA."

Hall has introduced H.R. 2292, The Pay Veterans First Act, which would freeze fiscal year 2007 bonuses set to be paid to senior level Veterans Affairs Department officials unless the VA has reduced its backlog of benefit cases to fewer than 100,000 claims.

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